

SWAC
WASTE REDUCTION/RECYCLING SUBCOMMITTEE
Friday, April 16, 2004
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Subcommittee Members Attending:

Mark Hooper, Chair
Robert Beckwith
Don Freas
Steve Goldstein
Shirley Shimada

Staff/Guests:

Dale Alekel
Kris Beatty
Jeff Gaisford
Bill Reed
Tom Watson

1. All-Consuming Marketing: The Rise of Disposables & Excess

Consumption and How We Can Respond. Tom Watson, Division staff, gave a dry run test of a presentation he will be giving at the upcoming Northwest Sustainability Conference. The presentation was structured so as to ask the subcommittee for input that he could incorporate into his presentation at the conference.

Tom focused on two overarching questions:

- Do we really need to use so much of the world's natural resources to produce all the "stuff" – packaging, disposable products, all the things that Americans have?
- Producing all this stuff generates long-term risks such as pollution, waste and toxics – is it worth it?

The subcommittee discussed the perceived benefits of producing and buying including:

- the material comforts and diversions
- more jobs and growth of the American economy.

Then the subcommittee discussed the negatives, including:

- Despite some short-term time-saving benefits, research shows that, overall, people do not feel happier and healthier today than in times when consumption was lower.
- There are significant long-term risks from using natural resources – pollution from manufacturing and transportation; global warming

- Many of the jobs created to produce these products are in other countries where factories do not have the same level of environmental protection that American factories have.

Tom asked the subcommittee members for their thoughts on what we can do as individuals to respond to excess consumption. The subcommittee discussed different perspectives for trying to bring about change:

- Accept the predominant culture and try to work within that culture to minimize bad effects
- Try to change the predominant culture
- Try to live a more basic life that minimizes consumption – set a personal example
- Instill a waste prevention ethic in children through education programs
- Become an activist – write to corporations and governments to complain, suggest and compliment
- Buy waste-reducing products

The subcommittee discussed the arguments that could be emphasized to persuade others to reduce consumption, including:

- Cost savings
- Hidden costs to governments, taxpayers, society
- Reusable products and sustainable industries can create jobs too.

Finally, the subcommittee discussed what governments can do to counter the rise of disposables and excess consumption. Ideas included:

- Do research to find out why people want to buy wasteful items
- Legislate disincentives on wasteful products, such as a tax on plastic bags
- Educate the public about hidden costs of excess consumption
- Lead by example
- Work with non-profits and other governments

2. LinkUp Program. Kris Beatty, Division staff, gave an update on the 2004 LinkUp Program, which works with manufacturers to use more recycled materials. The LinkUp program provides technical assistance and promotional and marketing support to its private sector partners. Since the program began in 2000, LinkUp has worked with 20 businesses.

New partners in 2003 and 2004 are:

- Big Shrimpy, which uses scrap flleece textiles in manufacturing pet beds

- Forest Concepts, which is developing an erosion control material called WoodStraw™ out of urban wood waste
- Durable Plastic Design, which manufactures Orcaboard™ plastic lumber and other recycled plastic outdoor products
- Tiger Mountain Innovations, which manufactures stone-like countertop slabs out of recycled mixed waste paper, fly ash and other materials
- Cedar Grove Composting, which makes compost out of yard and food waste.

Partners for which projects are currently underway include:

- Tri-Vitro Corporation -- promotion of glass filtration in various applications (industrial, construction site, parking lots, stormwater drainage, other)
- Forest Concepts – identify specifications for erosion control and funding sources for product development
- Bedrock Industries – spring promotion of their Stoneyard where they sell recycled glass products
- Urban Hardwoods – business planning
- MetaMorf Design – help develop municipal contacts for plastic bench sales

The LinkUp program is currently recruiting new partner manufacturers. The priority materials are paper, wood, food, yard waste and electronics. Case studies of LinkUp success stories are also being developed and will be posted on the web. In June there will be an event for LinkUp partners focusing on funding and financing options for green businesses.

The subcommittee suggested that LinkUp partners be invited to make presentations to the full SWAC about their products.

3. Green Schools and School WR/R Assistance Programs. Dale Alekel, Division staff, briefed the subcommittee on two Division programs that provide assistance to K-12 schools (public and private) throughout King County (excluding Seattle)

A. School Recycling & Waste Reduction Assistance Program. This program provides technical assistance to help schools reduce waste and recycle at their facilities. In the 2003-04 school year, the program provided assistance to 23 schools. Assistance consists of:

- Waste walk-through (using a waste audit form that Dale circulated)

- “Report card” which includes recommendations on how the school can increase its recycling rate, decrease garbage volume, procure recycled products -- and save dollars on garbage disposal costs
- Meeting with the principal and custodian to review recommendations and decide what steps to take
- Hands-on assistance with containers, signage, education and promotion of the recycling program, trouble-shooting and problem solving (The biggest challenge is that custodians do not often collect recyclable materials – it’s a volunteer student effort in most schools.)
- Measure results of assistance (including revised recycling rate) 3 – 6 months after changes are made

Two Bellevue elementary schools that were assisted – Newport Heights and Bennett – are receiving Earth Heroes at School awards for the milk carton recycling program that we helped them to establish. In one of these schools, 5000 milk cartons are recycled each week and in the other, 4600 milk cartons are recycled each week.

B. Green Schools Program. The goals of the Green Schools Program are:

- To help participating schools and school districts improve or expand their conservation practices and reduce related costs.
- To help schools become better stewards of the environment and serve as models for their students and the community.

The program has 8-steps:

- i. A school or school district selects categories (including the required WRR category) from the eight Green Schools Program categories (WRR, environmental purchasing, litter reduction, hazardous waste management and reduction, energy conservation, water conservation, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and addressing environmental issues in the classroom).
- ii. The Division provides assessments in each selected category, including a waste walk-through. If the participant has selected energy conservation, Puget Sound Energy partners with the Division to provide energy audits and recommendations. If the participant has selected “hazardous waste management and reduction”, the Division asks Local Hazardous Waste Management Program staff to assist with assessments of science laboratory chemicals.
- iii. The Division helps the school or district set measurable goals in each category.

- iv. The Division recommends strategies or practices that will help the participant reach its goals. Goals are revised if needed.
- v. A pledge form listing categories and measurable goals is signed by the principal or superintendent (depending upon whether it's a school or district), the head custodian and other staff involved in the program.
- vi. Changes are made. The Division assists with research/information, hand-holding, provision of recycling containers/signage, promotion and education.
- vii. The Division measures results.
- viii. King County provides recognition on the program's web site, through media releases and through other means of interest to the participants.

In the 2003-2004 school year, the program has focused on assistance to school districts, which typically pay for utilities and are responsible for procurement, and therefore must be part of any substantive, system-wide change. The school districts that are currently participating in the program are Vashon and Northshore. In addition, the program is continuing to work with Bellevue High and Tolt Middle School (two of the pilot schools last year) and two additional private schools – The Evergreen School (Shoreline) and Three Cedars (Bellevue).

The subcommittee noted that assistance seemed to be concentrated in affluent cities/areas where schools may have additional resources, and expressed their hope that funding would continue for this program.